

FROM THE CELL TO THE WORLD

was still seeking a sign like the Pharisees of old, and the fame of the maiden of Fonte Branda (probably through the report of the legate of Bologna) had penetrated even into the papal palace of Avignon.

We do not know by what means his appeal was conveyed to Catherine, nor whether she was aware of the character of the ecclesiastic with whom she was now dealing; but her answer is extant, and it is one of the most striking of her political letters. To this wicked man, too, she writes in the precious blood of God : " with desire of seeing you a true priest, and a member bound in the body of Holy Church." The first part of the letter is an impassioned hymn to charity, by whose milk the soul lives, the love that binds the soul to Christ even as it bound the Son of God to the Cross, the fire that burns away vice and sin and love of self. All must follow this rule of love, purifying memory, understanding, and will in this divine fire. Above all, God demands from men in the position of the Abbot a zeal and solicitude for the salvation of souls. " This is the way of Christ crucified, who will always give us the light of peace. But, if we hold another way, we shall go from darkness to darkness, and ultimately to eternal death." Her answer to the Pope is that two things in particular are disfiguring the Church, and must be taken away: nepotism, "excessive tenderness and solicitude for kinsmen," and leniency in dealing with the wickedness of the clergy. " Christ specially hates three perverse vices : impurity, avarice, and the puffed-up pride which reigns in the Spouse of Christ, that is, in the prelates, who attend to nought save pleasures and states and excessive riches. They see the infernal demons carrying off the souls of their subjects, and they reckon not of it, because they have become wolves and sellers of the divine grace." " I say not that the Spouse of Christ will not be persecuted; but I believe that she will remain in flower. It is necessary, for her complete reformation, that she should be pulled down even to her foundations." As to the Abbot's own professed repentance : " I, your unworthy daughter, have taken and will take the debt of your sins upon myself, and we shall burn yours and mine together in

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